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ABSTRACT

The political context surrounding Canadian broadcasting dramatically changed following the election of a conservative government in 1984, and Canada's current broadcasting debate is marked by national and special interest concerns. While an important social aspect of the system is its profoundly undemocratic nature, the constituent elements of a democratic public medium exist. In dealing with the democratization of communications, it is first necessary to clarify the place of communications in democratic public life, then recognize the public character of the media. The Canadian broadcasting experience has contributed its share to obscuring the emancipatory potential of broadcasting, but it also contains the seeds of its own antithesis, and the struggles around it provide many instructive elements of an alternative approach to broadcasting based on a reconstituted public dimension. This public dimension can be fully realized only if a number of critical areas are transformed. From a critical analysis of the Canadian experience and the alternative practices and proposals that have marked it, there emerge some elements of a more coherent, responsive, direct system of public broadcasting. (71 end notes) (CGD)

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THE PUBLIC DIMENSION OF BROADCASTING:

LEARNING FROM THE CANADIAN EXPERIENCE

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Paper presented to the
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THE PUBLIC DIMENSION OF BROADCASTING: LEARNING FROM THE CANADIAN EXPERIENCE

In all the industrialized countries, the traditional vocations of broadcasting are being reconsidered under the signs of technological determinism and political conservatism. In the process, the basic foundation on which broadcasting has been based, its public service function, is disintegrating.

Faced with this situation, the natural response of progressive individuals and public interest groups has been to retrench in defence of national public service broadcasters, often in a somewhat desultory fashion as those institutions have over the years given their public defenders more than enough cause to ask why they should be saved [1]. In Canada, as elsewhere, this approach continues to inhibit the emergence of a meaningful alternative to both state and market conceptions of the public, a new conception that would be the basis for imagining new emancipatory uses for broadcasting and the newer communications technologies.

The Canadian experience, which a lucid observer once described as a history of missed opportunities [2], has contributed its share to obscuring the emancipatory potential of broadcasting. But it also contains the seeds of its own antithesis, and the struggles around it provide many instructive elements of an alternative approach to broadcasting based on a reconstituted public dimension.

Portrait of the current situation

Since the last ITSC Conference in 1984, the political context surrounding Canadian broadcasting has dramatically changed. In September 1984, the Canadian voting class neatly completed a right-anglo triangle linking Ottawa, Washington and London, electing a Conservative government that Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan could be proud to call their friend. Among other things, the new government appeared determined to radically restructure the framework of Canadian broadcasting in line with its own image. It had a full mandate ahead of it in which to go through the due process of white papers, parliamentary hearings and legislative debate. Unfettered by Liberal ideology, the Conservatives boldly set out to complete the industrialization of Canadian broadcasting.

In New York a few weeks after the election, the new prime minister, Brian Mulroney, told potential American investors that Canada was open for business again, specifically mentioning broadcasting as one of the previously forbidden areas that would soon be available [3]. On Nov. 8, the finance minister, Michael Wilson, announced economic austerity measures in public spending and ordered the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation to cut $75 million, or about 7½%, from its operating budget. In December, the minister of communications, Marcel Masse, announced that the government would undertake a full-scale broadcasting policy review.

As Conservative intentions in broadcasting and communications began to crystallize, Masse emerged as the man of the hour. As has often been the case in the past twenty years, the architect of Canadian communications policy was a federal

politician from Quebec. Masse cut an enigmatic figure. He was known as a Quebec nationalist with a prominent bias towards the private sector. As a provincial cabinet minister in two conservative Quebec governments of the late 1960s, he had been noticed for his strong positions on language and education, and had been involved in the federal-provincial struggle over educational broadcasting. Later, in the 1970s, he had travelled the world as a trouble-shooter for the Quebec-based transnational engineering firm, Lavalin, Inc.

Masse quickly established himself as one of the most active members of the Mulroney government, and he sometimes seemed to be everywhere at once, introducing legislation to tighten government control over the independent broadcast regulatory agency, the CRTC, one day, signing the first-ever federal-provincial communications accord with Quebec the next. In his frequent speeches, he took to fondly quoting R. B. Bennett -- the staunch free enterprising tory prime minister who had created Canadian public broadcasting in 1932 -- especially passages which showed Bennett advocating public broadcasting as a transitional measure while waiting for future improvements in economic and technological conditions [4]. To Masse, the future was now.

It soon emerged that Masse's vision of the future of Canadian broadcasting was based on three principles: reduced public spending, expanded private development, and -- a new wild card -- a greater role for provincial governments and agencies. On April 9, 1985, he announced creation of a task force to make recommendations 'on an industrial and cultural strategy to govern

the future evolution of the Canadian broadcasting system through the remainder of this century'. The terms of reference of its mandate were as follows:

> "The strategy will take full account of the overall social and economic goals of the government, of government policies and priorities, including the need for fiscal restraint, increased reliance on private sector initiatives and federal-provincial co-operation, and of the policies of the government in other related economic and cultural sectors. It will also take full account of the challenges and opportunities in the increasingly competitive broadcasting environment presented by ongoing technological developments." [5]

It would be a challenge to the imagination to introduce a public dimension to a strategy based on such considerations. However, the task force interpreted its mandate broadly and conducted its work with some openness, although a certain ambivalence: in response to public pressure, it organized a series of public meetings around the country at which anyone could present their views, but these were not formal hearings, and were in fact supplementary to the more substantial private meetings the task force held with interested groups. The public manifestations in themselves illustrated an important aspect of the problem at hand: unlike the earlier era of broad consensus on the role and nature of a public broadcasting system (at least in English Canada [6]), in 1985 nearly all groups to appear before the federal task force did so with some special interest to promote. In fact, the task force was faced with a string of disparate particular demands for services, and a remarkable absence of overall vision of what a public broadcasting system should be. While the debate surrounding the task force's work focussed on the national issue of cultural sovereignty and the industrial problems of Canadian broadcasting, the extent to which

the Canadian public, or publics, are excluded from effective participation in the system, except as taxpayers and individual consumers of services, was submerged.

The most evident impression one had from following the task force's activities was that it would have to work around an appalling lack of consensus on the overriding public purpose of broadcasting, and even on the public interest in broadcasting. Instead of being asked to imagine a new definition of broadcasting as public service, the task force was expected to navigate an unmarked course across a sea of competing private or special interests.

The different interests were not equal in nature, and could be schematically divided into two broad categories: the cultural communities (national and regional groups, ethnic and social minorities), and the cultural industries (private sector, public sector, creators and producers).

In a system based on public service, it would seem to be self-evident that the purpose of policy is to ensure that the latter are enabled to fulfil the needs of the former. But the debate was not so clearly focussed: there has been a good deal of argument in favour of 'Canadian' broadcasting -- mostly from the cultural and artistic milieux with a direct work-related interest; and there was a grand defence of national/public broadcasting organized in and around the CBC. But there was little positive discussion about what else besides 'Canadian' Canadian broadcasting should be, and there was no critical questioning of what national public broadcasting in Canada had become.

In the major arenas of public debate, it was thus difficult to imagine a renewed notion of public broadcasting -- one that would imply more than a certain regime of ownership and an official mandate, to include such things as a more equal relationship between professionals and audiences, and the accountability of media managers to citizens.

While the task force struggled with its mandate, there was no moratorium on evolution in the Canadian broadcasting system, and the system continued to move away from one with a primarily public focus. The 1984-5 cuts to the budget of the CBC were followed by more of the same in 1985-6 [7]. The rapprochement between Ottawa and Quebec, expressed in a document on 'The future of French-language television in Canada' [8], reflected the proposed dependency on the private sector of both governments for solutions to broadcasting problems. A string of sporadic incidents during 1985 increased the gap between policy and public broadcasting, prejudicing the climate in which the task force deliberated: the re-introduction of a discredited piece of Liberal legislation giving the cabinet power to issue directives to the CRTC; the issuing, even while this legislation was before Parliament, of a cabinet directive abrogating a Liberal measure to prohibit cross-media ownership in the same market; the suspension sine die of statutory CRTC hearings on CBC television licences and their automatic renewal; the licensing of a new French-language commercial television station in Montreal; and most strangely, the parallel preparation by Department of Communications officials of position proposals on broadcasting policy, even while the task force was sitting.

Conceptions and misconceptions of public broadcasting in Canada

In a paper to the first ITSC in 1984, I analysed the role of broadcasting in the playing out of Canada's internal national unity crisis, concluding that 'the Canadian experience points to the inevitable limitations of the national principle as a basis for an emancipatory approach to communications media' [9]. The same conclusion must be drawn, I fear, from looking at the extent to which Canadian broadcasting has failed to live up to its public service promise.

This is understandable, in light of the intentionality gap separating the various proponents of public broadcasting in Canada over the years. In 1931, at the height of the debate that eventually led to creation of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, public broadcasting advocate Graham Spry situated the question this way:

> "The issue is freedom. Let the air remain as the prerogative of commercial interests and subject to commercial control, and how free will be the voice, the heart of democracy. The maintenance, the enlargement of freedom, the progress, the purity of education, require the responsibility of broadcasting to the popular will. There can be no liberty complete, no democracy supreme, if the commercial interests dominate the vast, majestic resource of broadcasting." [10]

By 1935, Spry was speaking of the role of broadcasting in 'the inevitable and incalculable social revolutions which are in process of being born'. Frontiers were changing, class power was being transformed, and only some form of public ownership of media could guarantee the freedom of expression necessary for change to take place peacefully [11]. The movement for public ownership and control of broadcasting in Canada contained 'the hope that new movements of opinion, as represented by socialist

groups, trade unions and farm associations, would be able to develop their support by the use of radio' [12].

These terms were alien to the official policy apparatus view of public broadcasting, which was formulated most transparently in 1961 by Liberal Party broadcasting critic J. W. Pickersgill, then in opposition, on the occasion of a regulatory decision permitting Canada's most important commercial television station to sell 25% of its share capital to U.S. interests:

> "It is precisely because we were afraid the whole market would have been taken by U.S. interests if there had not been public participation that we have had this public participation. I have never heard any Canadian who was not a socialist defend it on any other grounds... I think it would be far better, if we could have the assurance that the broadcasting would be Canadian, to have entirely private broadcasting." [13]

Thus, while public broadcasting contained a social vision for those who struggled for it in Canadian society, it had only a national purpose for those in power. This is crucial to remember when looking at the terms in which the current debate is framed.

The community-building possibilities of public broadcasting have always been resisted by official Canada, especially the building of alternative solidarities that could threaten the Canadian national project. In the 1960s, new ideas of public broadcasting emerged within the CBC in opposition to the 'state broadcasting' approach demanded by the government and acquiesced to by senior CBC management. In 1966, a celebrated row broke out when the CBC declined to renew the contracts of the hosts of the popular and irreverent television public affairs program, 'This Hour Has Seven Days'. Co-host Patrick Watson described the program's philosophy of public broadcasting to the parliamentary

committee that convened to inquire into the affair:

> "...it seems to us there is a future in having a very large number of the people of this country doing the same thing at the same time; that is, sharing an experience which then leads them, in fact, to communicate with each other. This is really quite important, in my concept of proper broadcasting; that it must be used to unite the country in that sense, not to propagandize, not to shout 'Hurrah, it is a great country and we are all in it together', but rather to meet the people where they are with ideas which they can think about and use because they are moved by sharing their experiences on television. Let them go out and say to their neighbour 'What is that all about?' or 'I hated that...', and in this way a dialogue will ensue, a conversation which they know is being shared across the country." [14]

The creators of 'Seven Days' insisted on the right to use television as a medium of social exchange, and not merely for political transmission. Co-host Laurier LaPierre added to this a self-management impulse, when he told the parliamentary committee:

> "I do not think the top management can expect a citizen, whoever he may be, not to take sides in a public debate on an issue... [15] I feel very strongly that the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation is a public trust vested in Parliament which delegates to the CBC the position of manager; but for this public trust to be exercised fully and completely... the structure must be such that authority not only flows from above but that dialogue flows up from below..." [16]

At the same time, new public approaches to broadcasting entirely outside the traditional structures were generated by community activists anxious to use media. The technological context of the late 1960s and early 1970s held out a utopian promise that took its concrete form in a practice that came to be known as 'community broadcasting'. Community broadcasting emerged with the concurrent development of relatively inexpensive lightweight video production technology and local cable distribution systems with unused channel capacity. The

combination appeared to be ideally suited to decentralizing and deprofessionalizing media production, while increasing access and public participation.

The first experiments with community broadcasting took place in urban centres like Vancouver, Winnipeg, Thunder Bay, and in the village of Normandin in Quebec's Lake St. John region [17]. The CRTC's first policy statement on cable undertakings in 1969 said that cable systems would be expected to do a minimal amount of original local programming. A Senate committee on mass media reiterated this hope in 1970, declaring that community programming distributed by cable provided the best possibility of true public access to media [18].

In 1971, the CRTC again emphasized the importance of community programming. Nationally, one of the leading advocates of community broadcasting was CRTC chairman Pierre Juneau (now president of the CBC). In July 1972, he told the annual convention of the Canadian Cable Television Association:

> "The cable industry is by nature decentralized... it recognizes that there exist decentralized communications needs. That society is fragmented, pluralistic, speaks and wants to speak and be heard in many voices... In our mass media, this active need for authentic expression cannot be accommodated." [19]

But while the CRTC encouraged, even urged, cable companies to provide for community programming, it did not make it obligatory. Of 387 cable companies licensed in 1972, only 139 provided some form of community programming, and 'very, very few of these gave open access' [20].

More important, community broadcasting was not seen as a new sector, to be fully developed so as to meet the needs that could

not be filled by either national public broadcasting or commercial private broadcasting. The possibility of community-controlled cable systems, as opposed to community access channels within privately-owned systems, was never seriously explored (although a working model has existed in Campbell River, B.C., since 1957 [21]). The CRTC's policy of moral suasion depended entirely on the benevolence of the cable companies, while resting on the paternalistic premise that local programming, unlike 'national' programming, required no public resources. Only in Quebec, which operated according to its own agenda, did community broadcasting later enjoy a very limited amount of state financial support. Despite some interesting alternative models provided by the community broadcasting experiences of the 1970s, the practice remained for the most part marginal [22]. To the extent that community programming became the focal point of the public dimension in broadcasting, it deflected critical attention from the political reality of the Canadian broadcasting system.

Thus, there has been a continuous historic demand for socially involved broadcasting in Canada, expressed variously throughout the years in calls for a less commercial and more responsive CBC, for grassroots, autonomous or community media, for democratization of media. These demands are still present today, even if they often appear to be eclipsed in the public spotlight by one dominant question, the question of 'cultural sovereignty'.

The smokescreen of cultural sovereignty

One of the key objectives of the Mulroney government is to liberalize trade arrangements with the United States. The government's commitment to 'free trade' has created a paradoxical situation for Canada's cultural industries: unlike other sectors, the cultural industries are not seeking access to U.S. markets, but protection against U.S. invasion of Canada.

The question was important enough to the captains of Canadian cultural industry to have them set up a high-power, high-profile committee to lobby the government against selling out Canada's cultural sovereignty. The committee includes the president of Maclean-Hunter, one of Canada's leading publishers of commercial periodicals and also a cable company proprietor; the president of Télémédia, the largest chain of private radio stations in Quebec; the chief executive of Toronto's CFTO-TV, the oldest and most lucrative privately-owned television station in Canada and flagship of the private CTV network; the president of the private Ontario regional network, Global television; and... the president of the CBC. Their purpose was to convince the government that Canadian industries should be protected in any free trade negotiations with the U.S. [23].

This is not the only cultural sovereignty lobby. Organizations representing artists and other cultural workers, like the Canadian Conference of the Arts, have been actively waving the banners of nationalism and protectionism. Communications minister Masse endeared himself masterfully to this lobby (and undoubtedly, to its capitalist counterpart as well) when he announced in September 1985, that Canada would not

compromise its cultural sovereignty in free trade negotiations with the U.S. Canadian culture would not be placed on the bargaining table, he told a federal-provincial meeting of ministers responsible for cultural affairs in Halifax [24].

As currently framed, the cultural sovereignty issue is a foil, masking private sector ambitions and plans and protecting the valid but corporatist interests of the cultural production milieu. Most important, it does not pose the taboo question: what is Canadian culture, anyway?? According to Toronto magazine editor Robert Fulford (a man who enjoys impeccable cultural nationalist credentials) the effect of the cultural sovereignty issue has been 'to obscure other issues, and to create a distorted impression of what Canadian culture is and why it deserves protection' [25].

The historic importance of cultural protectionism in Canada, and the possibility that free trade would eliminate it, has mobilized the artistic and cultural circles and forged a solidarity of common interest between the entrepreneurs and the creators of Canadian cultural industry. In the process, as Fulford noted, the minister of communications has gone through a metamorphosis from a budget-cutting villain to a far-sighted nationalist hero.

One of the issues obscured by the cultural sovereignty debate concerns the progressive withdrawal of the state from social and financial responsibility in the cultural sphere. The cultural columnist for the Toronto periodical This Magazine, Susan Crean, wrote last April:

> "I think what may be happening is simply that a class of cultural capitalists now exists in Canada which has learned, over the years, how to make a fancy buck out of trafficking in American (or imitation, made-in-Canada, American) culture, and they now have high stakes in the status quo... For the artistic community, I think cultural sovereignty is a slyly laid trap." [26]

Crean is right about the cultural capitalists' stakes in the status quo, especially in broadcasting where the government has been eager to support the increased ascendancy of the private side of the system. It is being assisted in this by the broadcasting regulatory agency, the CRTC, which in a string of recent decisions has strengthened the private and diminished the public interest. The CRTC since 1984 has authorized new commercial services, such as the addition of 16 new specialized subscriber services on Canadian cable systems, and a new private French-language television station in the lucrative Montreal market; it has renewed CBC broadcasting licences without public hearings, and proposes to allow telecommunications carriers to raise their rates automatically, bypassing public hearings as well.

The issue of cultural sovereignty and the thrust to develop the private sector overlap curiously with the government's apparent intention to move towards greater collaboration with the provinces. Almost immediately upon assuming office in 1984, the Conservatives made a number of important gestures to indicate the arrival of a new era in federal-provincial relations, especially with respect to Quebec, and especially regarding communications, which had historically been a notable area of discord [27].

On Feb. 1, 1985, Ottawa and Quebec signed an agreement on communications enterprises development, the first

intergovernmental communications accord betwen them since establishing their respective communications ministries a few months apart in 1969. Under terms of the accord, the two governments would provide $40 million to stimulate investment and job creation in the communications sector, as well as encourage research and technical innovation, and support the production, development and marketing of such enterprises' goods and services, especially in export markets [28].

In May 1985, the fruits of federal-provincial collaboration yielded a major report on 'The Future of French-Language Television' [29]. A joint committee, chaired by the deputy ministers of communications of both Ottawa and Quebec, had been struck soon after the 1984 elections to examine the particular question of French-language broadcasting. This was the first time the question had been considered in a context stripped of political or constitutional implications. It was a remarkably astute move by the new government, designed to show a clear break with its predecessor's obsession with the centralization of jurisdiction in communications. One of the report's recommendations, if heeded, would make an important change in the future course of Canadian broadcasting evolution:

> "...that the special nature of the French-language television system be recognized within the Canadian broadcasting system, and that government policies and regulations be adapted accordingly." [30]

This would mean, for example, that Radio-Canada would 'be allowed to evolve separately from the CBC' -- a major departure from the historic approach of 'two services, one policy'.

But the bulk of the proposals indicated importance of

private economic development in the joint committee's scheme of things: thus, cable policy should favour French pay-tv services over English ones (a kind of protectionism for Québécois entrepreneurs, as well as a measure of cultural self-defence); there should be more investment in French programming by private broadcasters, more public support for independent production, and collaboration between private and public networks to maximize audience penetration and minimize erosion of the francophone market; finally, French broadcast signals would be delivered to underserved areas (and if the pan-Canadian model for service to remote areas was followed, this would mean a consortium of private broadcasters piggy-backing on public satellite resources).

The new climate of Ottawa-Quebec 'collaboration' was tentatively dampened by the provincial election that returned the Liberals to power in Quebec in December 1985. But the honeymoon in communications still appears to be on. In January 1986, just more than a month after taking office, Quebec communications minister Richard French proposed to make Radio-Québec the centerpiece of a national (Canadian) French language educational network [31].

Two days later, Marcel Masse voiced his approval of the idea. On Feb. 14, Masse and Quebec communications minister Richard French signed a new four-year agreement on federal-provincial cooperation, aimed at 'harmonizing' French-language television policies in areas such as the new international francophone satellite station, TV5. Quebec now enjoyed an

official role in determining federal policy, Masse announced [32]. The joint ministerial statement also announced a plan to 'export' Quebec-produced educational television to the rest of Canada by extending the provincial network, Radio-Québec (a scheme first proposed by French only in January, the project has already been put on hold).

It remains to be seen how far the new relationship between Ottawa and Quebec will be able to go -- the report on French-language television has received almost no attention in English Canada, where the various lobbies are not likely to react with sympathy if its implementation encroaches on scarce resources that could otherwise be earmarked for them. As for the alternative promise of provincial regional broadcasting, recent events surrounding Radio-Québec are particularly instructive.

During the December 1985 provincial election campaign, the Quebec Liberal Party had promised to freeze Radio-Québec's budget at its existing level, pending parliamentary hearings on the mandate, orientations, and objectives of the educational broadcaster [33]. But in March 1986, Quebec announced an $8 million budget cut to Radio-Québec (about 14%), in spite of the Liberals' election promise and French and Masse's expansion plans. It soon emerged that the cuts would be effected largely by shutting most if not all of Radio-Québec's nine 'regional' offices -- which had grown out of an important reform of Quebec educational broadcasting following a year of public consultation in the late 1970s. Union and public interest groups have opposed the plan, on the grounds that it disposes of Radio-Québec's specific vocation in the Quebec televisual galaxy, and will turn

the province's 'autre télévision' into 'une télévision comme les autres' [34].

In 1938, the Canadian scholar Harold Innis identified 'the weakening of nationalism, the strengthening of regionalism, and the stress on imperialism' in Canada as the weak link in the continental political economy of North America [35]. This perceptive observation is important to recall at a time when Canada is itching to negotiate a 'free trade' agreement with the United States, while insisting that whatever else may be on the bargaining table, its 'cultural sovereignty' is not negotiable. Historically, the principal Canadian policy issue has always been how to deal with American cultural domination, and it may be time to consider whether that emphasis does not obscure more than it reveals about the real nature of Canadian media as well as the U.S. connection in Canada. The emphasis on national considerations has only been maintained at the cost of subsuming the other major tensions in Canadian broadcasting: between public and private ownership, between different jurisdictional models, between different structural approaches. By persistently camouflaging these issues, the cultural sovereignty argument has in fact prevented the extension of the public dimension of broadcasting in Canada. In fact, if one were inclined to see things this way, one could argue that the thwarting of the democratic potential of media in Canada in the name of a national interest actually serves the interests of American capital in the long run. Perhaps that's what Innis was getting at after all.

In a general overview of Canadian communications issues published in 1977, Patricia Hindley, Gail Martin and Jean McNulty formulated the key question this way:

> "If Canada is so intent on resisting American domination, what are we resisting it _for_?" [36]

This is really the fundamental question in Canadian communications, and not surprisingly, it originates in British Columbia, a region that has produced the most trenchant critiques of communications in English Canada, [37]. Indeed, part of the problem lies in the fact that in anglophone central Canada there is a virtual taboo on asking such questions. For Hindley _et al_, the question

> "...requires us to dig deeply into the core of the Canadian experience, where we come face to face with the critical tensions: between provincial and federal, regional and national, periphery and centre." [38]

This is where, in practice, an institution like the CBC has failed, partly due to the political and economic pressures placed upon it by successive governments, and partly due to its own administrative logic. This logic is not contested in most of the eloquent pleas in support of an unspecified 'Canadian' broadcasting that characterize central Canadian policy interventions [39]. It does not address the basic problem with the Canadian formula which, according to Hindley _et al_, is the relationship of the parts to the whole.

> "In communications terms, what happens to the provinces and the regions in policy and practice is that they become the spokes of a wheel of which Ottawa, Toronto or Montreal is the hub. Communications among the members of the periphery is encouraged _only_ if it passes _through_ the hub." [40]

> "Ultimately, of course, the struggle to reorganize the communications patterns of the country becomes a struggle for power. The one-way, central Canada-dominated communications

> pattern is the counterpart to the political and economic structure of the country." [41]

The critique of 'national' broadcasting in Canada points to, but does not yet name the most important social aspect of the system -- its profoundly undemocratic nature. Most of the time, in its most important manifestations, Canadian broadcasting exhibits the characteristics of what C. Wright Mills called 'mass', as opposed to 'public' media [42]. But within the system, there is a 'hinterland dynamic' at play, to use Liora Salter's term for the responses from the territorial and intellectual margins that emerge in the form of critical journalism and autonomous media:

> "Some news and public affairs programming on CBC radio is public; a small proportion of CBC television or commercial media production is public as well. Also there are journalists who can be said to act within the public domain, although they write for commercial media. Those who work in community radio and cable systems and edit or publish small journals work in public media." [43]

Thus, in spite of the tendency of media to extend the reaches of empire and create monopolies of knowledge that rob the public of legitimacy in the interpretation of its own experience (an idea attributed to Innis), they also have the capacity to develop at the periphery of empire and serve as vehicles of resistance, decentralizing information and hence diffusing power.

With mainstream critical concern tending to focus massively on the 'national' problems of the Canadian broadcasting system, few prominent voices have been raised to deal with its 'social' problems. An important exception was a 1981 appeal for media democratization by David MacDonald, who had served as minister of communications in the short-lived government of Conservative Joe

Clark in 1979 [44].

Reform of the media, making them publicly accountable and giving the citizen power to do more than consume, was the key to a more democratic political system and would regenerate political life, MacDonald wrote. 'Democratization' of media would mean structural safeguards to prevent favouritism toward or discrimination against particular groups or individuals; expanded contact between decision-makers and a diverse public; increased public participation in decision-making; and raised critical awareness of and responsibility for the operation of media institutions.

Reframing the fundamental issues in Canadian broadcasting in terms of democratization rather than national purpose makes it possible to deal with them from a public media perspective. For the issue of democratization encompasses and goes beyond cultural sovereignty and allows us to distinguish particular, private interests from social, or public interests. Democratization is the necessary pathway from the present media system to a system that would be 'public' in the classical sense.

In the present context, the only way we can speak about public media is in tandem with a program of democratization. The constituent elements of a democratic, public media system exist, in the historic experience, concrete examples, and proposals that have been made in the context of Canadian broadcasting. They have only to be ordered and put into practice.

Pathways Towards Democratization: Some Examples from the Canadian Experience

a. Mainstream Media and the role of professionals

An important attempt to deal with the relationship between media professionals and their publics has been made by the collective association of CBC English-language television producers. In a thoughtful 1983 document, the producers take a highly critical view of the way the CBC has conducted its public service mandate and propose radical changes in programming and production decision-making [45].

The producers' association argues against the CBC strategy of attempting 'to beat the Americans at their own games' with big-budget national productions (like the public affairs program 'The Journal' and the dramatic mini-series 'Empire'). This approach, they say, 'results in fewer resources available for diverse programming or experimental programming in the context of local needs and individual area interests' [46]. Their concern is that the pooling of funds for network production erodes the capacity of Canadian producers to develop 'distinctive, responsive programming' where it is most important, in the regions. Coming from the centre of the system, it is a strong indictment.

The producers argue that the CBC's public broadcasting mandate requires it to provide national programs presenting Canadian perspectives, to meet the needs of local and regional expression and share these expressions among regions, and to offer the best available world programming.

They proposed a 'bottom-up' approach to programming, where

objectives would be determined in each region and then made public before being discussed at the national level. Public response could then influence programming decisions, which would be made 'in a competitive forum' involving regional producers and management of the different program areas. The setting of clear and publicly-known regional and network objectives would provide a framework for considering specific program proposals from in-house or independent producers. Decision-making would be 'zero-based', that is, every program would need to be proposed and justified annually.

While admittedly awkward and difficult, the producers said such a process is 'essential to the foundation and maintenance of a responsive television service which meets public needs and aspirations'. It would require a profound organizational restructuring of the CBC.

The producers' critique is particularly interesting in light of what is known about CBC production practices. This area of arcane knowledge has been well-protected from independent scrutiny, and has only been penetrated by the most persistent researchers. Canadian communications scholar Peter Bruck, trying to arrange field work in the news room of the CBC's flagship current affairs radio program 'Sunday Morning', was told at one point by the assistant-director of CBC English radio current affairs:

> "You see, the people who work here work for a public corporation, that's true, but everybody wants also to keep his privacy, a privacy about his doing his job... I want my privacy. And I think we have a right to it, we work for a public corporation, but we have our private ways of doing it." [47]

As Bruck concluded, what the newsworker considered his legitimate 'privacy' was merely a superficial manifestation of the considerable power embedded in professional newswork. It is interesting to read this experience against the pleas for maintaining the status of the CBC's professionally prestigious national services while local and regional services are emaciated and scrapped [48].

b. Autonomous media

In the 1960s and 1970s, the critique of traditional media in Canada spawned attempts to create autonomous alternatives. In English Canada, community media operated 'between the public and private sector in broadcasting and as a critique of both' [49], but its preoccupation with 'process' prevented it from establishing a meaningful base. In a sense, one might say, if the mainstream media functioned as though the finished product justified even the most sordid authoritarian means, community media generally assumed they would acquire a natural following no matter how unattractive the product.

The only place in Canada where community media gained a definite foothold (albeit still highly marginal) was in Quebec, where the provincial ministry of communications in the 1970s saw support for community media as a way to recapture some of the broadcasting space constitutionally occupied by Ottawa. This became especially important after a Supreme Court decision of 1977 awarded jurisdiction over cable regulation to Ottawa. Yet, in 1984, Quebec community media received only $600,000 in direct public subsidies from Quebec, as compared to $60 million for the

official provincial broadcaster, Radio-Québec (not to mention the estimated $236 million for the French-language television services of Radio-Canada) [50]. In exchange for this support, Quebec's community media have been effectively integrated to the apparatus of the state, with predictable deforming consequences that have not gone unremarked upon by their critics [51]. Nonetheless, Quebec's 37 community television channels and two dozen community radio stations provide a potentially important foundation for community-controlled public media.

The experience of Canadian northern broadcasting provides a different example of an attempt to create autonomous public media.

The CBC began operating a Northern Service in 1958, and according to northern broadcasting scholar and activist Lorna Roth [52], policy in this area evolved on a post hoc basis 'in response to a technological policy determined to make Canada internationally competitive in the aerospace industry' [53]. It was a policy based strictly on objectives formulated from a 'southern' perspective -- technological extension, industrial development, protection of national sovereignty, cultural integration... -- until the northern population organized itself into lobby groups in 1974, to promote its regional and cultural interests with respect to the CBC's 'Accelerated Coverage Plan'.

Inuit pressure for a native-managed, organized and maintained communications system led to self-initiated media projects aimed at developing pertinent uses of broadcasting technology and encouraging participation in community

development. These projects included field tests to explore forms of communication suited to the north (e.g., interactive audio; local film and video production centres; interactive video/audio satellite links between villages); projects to counter the effects of southern program influence (e.g., film production workshops organized with the National Film Board; community television); and projects using community media for collective organization and community development.

By 1980 the Inuit projects had become 'a viable means of challenging the federal government to define the parameters of its Northern communication policies' [54]. Inuit efforts by this time had led to acceptance of the position that any new tv channels in Inuit communities would be controlled by the community through 'local broadcasting societies', and any revenue generated would be allocated to the community broadcasting society for production of Inuit programs.

In 1980, the CRTC set up a special committee to study the extension of services to northern and remote communities. One Inuk representative was invited to serve on the committee, which became a public forum exploring the television program options of northern groups.

The Inuit Taparisat of Canada (Inuit Brotherhood of Canada) proposed establishment of an Inuit broadcasting corporation to do programming, distribution of its own production, provide access to transmitter, transmit educational and community development video, extend services, and ensure community control of additional channels to be made available via satellite. In

addition, it called for reducing the CBC northern service to 10-12 hours per day, freeing 4-6 hours on the national northern network for Inuit broadcast. Satellite time for the northern channel would thus be shared by the CBC and the Inuit, on the premise that the CBC by itself had been unable to meet Inuit needs.

In July 1980, the CRTC committee published its report [55], providing the first real framework describing the planning assumptions of Canada's northern broadcasting policy. The report recommended the licensing of commercial satellite services to the north (a proposal which led to the creation in 1981 of the commercial consortium Cancom); the interim delivery by the federal government of 'one composite public service channel of alternative entertainment programming'; the extension of basic services; provision for native cultural opportunities; a separate parliamentary appropriation for native broadcasting; and the introduction to Canada of pay-tv.

The Inuit organization applied for, and in July 1981 received, a television broadcasting licence and $3.9 million as an operating advance against pending land claims settlements. The Inuit Broadcasting Corporation began broadcasting in January 1982. However, the Inuit must remain constantly mobilized and vigilant to protect their initiative from the continued exposure to policy decisions rooted in the south, such as the legalization of private earth receiving stations proposed in the federal broadcasting policy of March 1983, which would ensure the inundation of the north with southern, mostly U.S. program signals.

Nonetheless, the northern experience is a good example of

community organization and mobilization to oblige the policy apparatus to respond to sociocultural needs [56].

c. Struggling for the Public Interest in Broadcasting

In the beginning, broadcasting in Canada was markedly shaped by the influence of a strong and well-organized public interest lobby, the Canadian Radio League. The original League has never really been equalled, in influence, energy or prestige, although analogous groups have reappeared at critical junctures in the evolution of broadcasting.

As was suggested earlier, Canada's broadcasting debate tends to be marked by national and special-interest concerns. Thus, an ad hoc 'Friends of Public Broadcasting' was formed in Toronto to protest the 1984 CBC budget cuts, and the Canadian Conference of the Arts maintains a vigilant stance in protection of the interests of the cultural and artistic milieux, but there has been little evident focus of a more general, overall public interest in the Canadian mainstream. The major exceptions to this have been two groups with non-national organizational frameworks, the Association for Public Broadcasting in British Columbia (APBBC) and the Quebec-based Institut canadien d'éducation des adultes (ICEA).

The APBBC was founded in 1972 'to block the projected licensing of new commercial television stations in western Canada and to put forward a public, noncommercial alternative' [57]. By 1973 it had official support of environmental, consumers, artistic, and labour groups, and was vigorously lobbying the CRTC. Its argument: 'Public broadcasting should be the norm for

Canada, not the exception. The licence structure should be expanded on the public, noncommercial side' [58]. Its strategic aim was the creation of a new public network anchored in the west, which would counter the power of the Toronto-centric CBC.

The APBBC's first plan called for the sharing of cable revenue between the existing distributors and the new public broadcasting organization. In place of advertising, the public broadcaster would carry public service information. When the CRTC rejected this proposal, the APBBC recommended reallocating cable licences to non-profit, viewer-owned co-operatives, as licence terms expired. When this plan was turned down too, the APBBC decided to stay in business as a vehicle of public education and public broadcasting advocate. Its founding president, Herschel Hardin, recalls:

> "As long as the CRTC was left undisturbed, it had the appearance of being something of a public broadcasting agency... If, however, anybody tried to pursue an issue from a broad public broadcasting point of view, as the APBBC did, the real nature of the agency rose to the surface." [59]

One of the main sites of critical research and action on communications in Quebec, the ICEA grew out of the pan-Canadian adult education movement and was founded as a separate body in 1956. During the 1950s and 1960s, it became the principal French-language lobby in communications in Canada, in addition to its other activities as an agent of social development and popular education.

Since then, the ICEA has been active in every public discussion on broadcasting in Canada and Quebec. It has regularly organized study sessions and other forms of public exchange on

mass communications media. In 1963 it undertook the first critical study of television program content done in Quebec, and the following year produced a major document on the history of broadcasting in Canada which still stands as a key historical reference source [60]. Beginning with a 'colloque' held in 1965, it has maintained a concern with the quality of media news and information programming.

In the 1970s, the ICEA broadened its role to begin acting as a catalyst of collective action on communications questions in Quebec, spearheading a common front of social groups that became the main public voice in the decisive debates surrounding the structure and orientation of the educational television network, Radio-Québec. Since 1979, the ICEA has animated a communications action-research group made up of representatives of the major union federations and voluntary associations, unions and other collective associations of communications workers and artisans, and communications researchers. This group provides resources and expertise for the ICEA interventions, while also acting as a clearing-house of ideas, and most important, as a meeting-place where the full range of progressive organizations in Quebec come together to deal with communications issues. This has resulted in an important series of publications, public manifestations and common interventions on pressing questions. In 1985, the focal point of the ICEA presentation to the federal task force on broadcasting policy was the need for democratization of the Canadian broadcasting system: the legal provision of entry points for grassroots public participation in policy-making, regulation,

and programming [61].

As models of critical reflection and action around media, the APBBC and the ICEA are excellent examples of public interest intervention. Characteristically, both come from the periphery of mainstream Canada.

d. Proposals for changing the system

In the climate of grand debates and sweeping policy statements of the late 1970s and early 1980s, there have also been proposals which, if heeded, would drastically transform the nature of the Canadian broadcasting system.

One of the most important of these came from the unlikely source of a 1977 Ontario government Royal Commission on Violence in the Communications Industry, chaired by a former federal secretary of state, Judy LaMarsh.

The LaMarsh report quickly established two things: the main focal point of the question before it was necessarily television, and there was no way to deal with the problem of violence without calling the entire system into question. The commission recommended placing all Canadian television programming under public control of an organization to be known as Television Canada, which would program a multi-channel, publicly directed cable system including both foreign and domestic content [62].

'Completely independent and answerable only to Parliament,' Television Canada would be financed by advertising and user fees, established along the lines of existing cable fees, and would not require a parliamentary subsidy. All programs other than news would be purchased from independent producers. All television

delivery systems (cable, public and private broadcasters) would be combined under a separate corporation of mixed public and private ownership [63].

Having clearly implied that the existing system was insensitive to the needs of the public, and making proposals harboring on nationalization of the private broadcasters and cable companies, the Ontario royal commission then went on to make recommendations which would result in the radical democratization of the system:

> "...to decentralize control and make such a system more responsive to viewers and their real social imperatives -- such as what models for behaviour are being shown -- there (would) be regional councils of volunteer listeners and viewers, for each official language, made up of nominees from interested groups. Each regional council would make nominations to Television Canada's Board of Directors, with such members to elect the chairman of the board." [64]

The proposal for 'council broadcasting' is a kind of recurring proposal whenever Canadians look at the decision-making structure of their system and find it wanting. National farm and adult education organizations regularly demanded, and in some cases gained, advisory councils on CBC programming in the 1940s and 1950s; Quebec's catholic labour unions recommended them to a royal commission on culture in 1950; the Alberta farm and labour groups envisaged a similar elective system in their unsuccessful 1946 attempt to create a co-operative radio station (a plan thwarted by the CBC); in the 1970s, the Fédération professionnelle des journalistes du Québec, called for news management councils in media enterprises. Even the CRTC has occasionally made squeaks in that direction.

But these recommendations of the Ontario royal commission were not heeded, nor was its call for a new Broadcasting Act,

> "to redefine the primary purpose of Canadian television as an independent service in the enlightened public interest and to provide for a better balance in all program categories, truly reflecting not only high ethical standards, but also the cultural and regional diversity of Canada." [65]

By the late 1970s, the stagnant and deteriorating situation was beginning to stimulate other proposals from unlikely sources as well. One of the most astute contributions came from a past president of the CBC, Alphonse Ouimet [66].

Ouimet -- who was well-placed to know as Canada's first television engineer and president of the CBC when cable was introduced -- described the key 'moment of flux' that accompanies the implementation of new technologies. In light of the technological context of 1979, marked by the proliferation of easy access to multiplied channel choice, Ouimet introduced the notion of a broadcasting 'programming undertaking', an intermediary structure between program producers and content carriers. Rather than allow the cable companies to play the role of programmer that they were demanding for themselves in the 1970s, Ouimet suggested this should be the responsibility of a completely separate agency [67].

Ouimet did not go a long way towards specifying the nature of his 'programming undertakings', which would basically be groups or corporations (public, private, mixed??) responsible for programming one or more channels; that is, for selecting, packaging, scheduling etc, in line with the needs of the particular audience a particular channel is supposed to serve.

The resulting complementary programming, he wrote, would provide television's chance 'to serve at the same time all tastes and needs and not just those of some artificial mass, (with) channels deliberately specialized so as to appeal to the many different interests in our pluralistic society' [68].

This recognition of the key question of programming in a multi-channel environment added a new element to the familiar ones dealing with control of the system and national origin of program content:

> "How we can best arrange our Canadian and foreign television content on cable is one of the most important questions of strategy we have to answer in the public interest." [69]

But in Ouimet's scheme it remained unclear who would control the programmers.

In 1983, broadcasting consultant Paul Audley (later executive director of the federal task force) presented a model for restructuring the basic 12-channel cable television service [70]. He would remove U.S. channels from the basic service and provide foreign content through Canadian commercial services; he would decommercialize CBC services and allow the present CBC affiliates and independent private broadcasters to develop a second private English-language national network; he would introduce new satellite-to-cable 'cultural uplift' services and non-profit pay-tv.

Audley's most interesting proposal was for a non-profit corporation (possibly a joint venture between the private broadcasters and the CBC) to acquire foreign programming and sell it to Canadian public and private broadcasters; it could also

program unpurchased foreign programming on its own non-profit channel. This system would restrict foreign programming to one channel instead of the present three or four, would ensure a higher quality, and would generate revenue that could be used to support Canadian production. Consumers who wished to acquire American signals could do so via the augmented converter service.

Audley estimated this plan would increase the amount of funds available for Canadian production by 80%, of which only 30% would have to come from public funds. Obviously, this assumed that the presently-constituted private sector, particularly the cable companies, should be obliged to see a large part of its current profits plowed back into Canadian production. On the other hand, it would create more space in the system for Canadian entrepreneurs, particularly producers and broadcasters.

This basically nationalist model thus included a creative effort to integrate a private enterprise element into a public service-oriented system -- and also recognized that this could only come about by enhancing the public sector. Its great limitation, from our perspective, is that it is still of a bureaucratic type, and restricts the definition of 'public' interest to an equation with national purpose. It could usefully be adapted, however.

For example, a cable-distributed system based on a full range of public television services might look like this [71]:

National services

-two channels of mainstream service, one English and one French, operated by national public corporations, and programmed by democratically selected citizens' boards

-one channel providing specific minority services, operated by a separate national public corporation which would develop and program projects proposed by minority groups

-two channels offering foreign programming, in English and French, operated by a separate national public corporation, and programmed by a representative citizens' board

Provincial/regional services

-one channel of mainstream service in each designated 'region' of Canada, each operated by a public corporation set up according to the same principle as the national mainstream service

-one channel to provide service to the cultural/linguistic minorities within each region, structured according to the same principle as the national minority service

Local/community services

-separate for each territory covered by a cable licensee, one or more channels as necessary to provide locally-determined services not available via other channels, to be acquired or produced out of cable company revenues, and programmed by local/community boards

Remaining frequencies could be conditionally licensed to 'private' broadcasters, subject to competitive renewal procedures; remaining positions on the basic cable service could be filled by the local/community programming board from range of available services; available services deemed lower priority would be programmed on higher tiers, providing additional revenue for the system without attaching discriminatory user fees to services that are considered socially important.

Reinventing the Public Dimension of Broadcasting

The problem of the public is still very much on the agenda in western society in 1986. Being able to invoke the support of the public remains the most powerful vehicle of legitimation in our type of society. The stakes involved in controlling the definition of what is public opinion, the public interest, and the public domain are high.

The starting point for dealing with the democratization of communications is to clarify the place of communications in democratic public life. The most radical demand one can make regarding media at the present time is for their universally public character to be recognized (as our society came to recognize its education or health care systems, following lengthy struggles). If we began to see our society as as a community of publics instead of an undifferentiated mass, we could then see the notion of public service media as addressing both the common needs of all as well as specific sets of particular needs.

The limits of the modern state as a guarantor of free expression have been historically recognized, in Canada and elsewhere, and thoughtful critics have sought to minimize these by building in checks and guarantees of autonomy. But this counter-measure has resulted in the pronounced power of bureaucratic institutions equally, when not more, remote from real public control and responsive to their own institutional needs before those of any public that they are deemed to serve.

In Canada in the mid-1980s, particularly in English Canada, the dominant critique of broadcasting and the main basis for public mobilization has been the national argument, and the defence of public broadcasting is most often limited to the defence of the CBC. Aside from the problems of focussing strictly on defensive struggles, this approach has the problem of minimizing the extent to which the 'national' principle has inhibited the development of a genuine public dimension in Canadian broadcasting.

But beneath the surface, the question was incredibly more

complex. First, the CBC was by 1985 a massive corporate entity effectively beyond public control. Second, the 'new' public sector of provincial broadcasters was occupying increasing (and increasingly interesting) space in the system. Third, public funds were no longer going only to broadcasters but also, (through the direct subsidies of the broadcast development fund), to private producers. Fourth, the private sectors consisted not only of broadcasters and independent producers, but distributors (cable companies, promoters of user-supported services, satellite consortia...) whose 'public' responsibilities were not inscribed in law but defined on an ad hoc basis by the regulatory authority. Fifth, regulation, it was now realized, could not meet the national objectives of broadcasting, and there was no consensus that it was the appropriate mechanism for meeting the public service objectives.

The Canadian system grew out of interaction between the social pressure for public broadcasting, economic pressure for private enterprise broadcasting, and political pressure for a system that would enhance Canada's national integrity against external and internal pressures. As the system has evolved, the public dimension has steadily diminished while the others have been enhanced, stripping broadcasting of its emancipatory potential. On the other hand, the Canadian experience has thrown up potent examples of the role of broadcasting in cultural and political resistance, of realized and unrealized alternatives to the dominant broadcasting models.

Broadcasting can become an instrument of emancipatory

communications only if its public diemnsion is fully realized. For this to happen in Canada, a number of crtiical areas must be transformed.

First, there is the question of jurisdiction. The respective roles of the federal and provincial governments must be reorganized and made to include other levels of political jurisdiction as well, such as municipalities, regional governments, and future institutions of popular control which do not yet exist.

The question of cultural sovereignty must be framed in a manner that reflects the diverse reality of the Canadian sociopolitical context, which is more than a 'national' one, or a 'Canadian' one. In this respect, the historic conflict between Quebec and English Canada is the most instructive element.

The place of private capital and cultural industries must be clearly specified as subsidiary to the objectives of public service. The 'arm's length' relationship of government to cultural agencies must be not only maintained but enhanced, so that no future 'national crisis' leads to a repeat performance of the past attempts by the federal government to control the CBC. As a corollary to these, the regulatory agency must act on behalf of the public, and not of any private interest.

A significant space in the system must be opened up to accommodate and encourage socially justified autonomous media, regardless of their economic viability or political expediency.

Finally, public participation must be widely extended and clearly defined in each of the following spheres:

-policy, where there must be a mechanism for direct public

participation at every stage of the policy formation and evaluation process

-regulation, where there must be a reform of the nomination process of members of the regulatory authority as well as a restructuring of the formal mechanisms of public participation which will increase their effectiveness

-programming, where representative citizens' councils could easily be involved in non-technical decisions at national, regional, and local levels of both publicly and privately owned broadcasters and distribution systems

-access, as consumers, to a healthy and balanced product; as communicating citizens, to the message-making and distribution systems; and as potential producers, to autonomous means of production for those who wish it.

These are some elements of a more coherent, more responsive, more direct system of public broadcasting that emerge from a critical analysis of the Canadian experience and the alternative practices and proposals that have marked it.

ENDNOTES

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20. Berrigan, ed. (1977): 87.

21. Berrigan, ed. (1977); Hardin (1985).

22. See Liora Salter, Two Directions on a One Way Street: Old and New Approaches in Media Analysis in Media Analysis in Two Decades (Burnaby, B.C.: Dept. of Communication, Simon Fraser University, 1979), typescript; see also Michel Sénécal, "Médias communautaires: état de marginalité ou marginalité d'Etat", Revue internationale d'action communautaire 6/46 (Fall 1981): 29-42.

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26. "Cultural Sovereignty: Negotiating the Non-Negotiable", This Magazine, (April 1986): 22-25, 25.

27. See Raboy (1985).

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